

Nadler Statement on Congressional Relief for Katrina Victims

Sunday, 11 September 2005

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Congressman Jerrold Nadler (D-NY) today returned to Washington to vote in favor of a \$10.5 billion emergency relief package for the hurricane-ravaged Gulf Coast. Congressman Nadler has been working with officials at the Department of Homeland Security and other federal agencies to improve the federal response to the catastrophe.

Nadler delivered the following remarks on the House floor following passage of the emergency appropriation.

“It is with a heavy heart that I rise today in support of the emergency relief bill. I know that all of us have been held rapt by the images and stories coming out of the Gulf Coast. The sorrow and suffering there is almost unimaginable, and it is my fervent hope and prayer that relief – real relief will come soon.

On top of our grief, there is also outrage. For it is nothing short of outrageous that in this country, where we talk about 9/11 every day, we still haven’t dedicated enough resources to improving our emergency response capabilities. The people of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, as they wait day after agonizing day for help to arrive, are crying out for leadership and, more simply, for help. What help has come at all is already too late for a great many who have died unnecessarily. If this is the best the world’s greatest power can do for its own people – and if it isn’t – it’s a national disgrace.

There will be plenty of time in the future to assess exactly why we were so poorly prepared for this storm, and why it has taken the federal government so long after the levees broke to get effective help to New Orleans. Certainly the roots of the inept handling of this situation are old and deep. But in the short term, we need to focus on solutions. We need real leadership, a real plan, and a much bigger contingent of emergency transportation and aid workers. Reports from every corner of embattled New Orleans are that the presence of law enforcement is at best minimal, and there is – five days after the hurricane, and three days after the levees broke – there is still no effective distribution of food, water or medicine. How can this be? We can’t let another hour pass without a substantive response to the galling shortfalls in the relief and evacuation effort.

I would like to join Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi in her call for the creation of a Select Hurricane Relief Task Force. I’m hopeful that we’ll be able to make substantive progress in the coming days.

Our hearts go out to all those affected, as well as to those who are doing their best to respond to this disaster. Tragically, it is evident that the federal government’s response has been wholly inadequate. Congress must insist on immediate improvement, so that we can put an end to the suffering in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast as soon as possible.

And finally, we must learn some lessons. We must never try to save money by not preparing to prevent, or to ameliorate, potential catastrophes. We did not – despite ample warning – properly build up and strengthen New Orleans’s defenses against hurricanes. We are paying a frightful price for that negligence.

We are not buying the loose nuclear material in the former Soviet Union before it is smuggled to Al Qaeda to make nuclear weapons.

We are not inspecting more than about 6 percent of the millions of shipping containers that enter our ports every year — any one of which could contain a weapon of mass destruction.

We are not adequately protecting our chemical and nuclear facilities against sabotage that could kill hundreds of thousands of Americans.

We should learn from this disaster. The administration and Congress cut the budget for building up levees, and we are reaping the whirlwind. The administration has acted unbelievably lethargically in bringing relief efforts, and people have died as a result.

Let us not continue our negligent disregard until we suffer a nuclear or chemical catastrophe. I am tired, Mr. Speaker, of passing post-catastrophe relief bills. It is time the Administration, and this Congress, act to prevent the next catastrophe.”

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